

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PURPOSE

The 13-member Comprehensive Long Range Plan Committee was appointed by the Board of Selectmen in 2001, following a vote at the 2001 Annual Town Meeting. The Committee was charged with adopting goals and objectives for the Town of Concord to the year 2020, and developing policies, strategies, tools, and techniques to achieve these goals. The last **Comprehensive** Long Range Plan for Concord was completed in 1974. In 1987, a Long Range Plan for *Land Use* was completed. Since 1974, a lot of planning has been completed by various departments, committees, and boards. Despite the Town's strong record in planning, there has been little opportunity for the Town to take a comprehensive look at the overall impact of individual plans and decisions; to consider the individual and collective financial implications of such planning; to reconcile differences among plans; and to set comprehensive goals for the Town.



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The Committee was charged with reviewing the following "Elements":

- Land Use
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Cultural and Historic Resources
- Natural Resources
- Open Space
- Recreation
- Facilities and Services
- Transportation and Circulation
- Fiscal Resources

In addition to the above ten, in the course of its review and deliberations, the Committee decided to add "Governance" as an eleventh Element, since many issues which arose during our study and deliberations did not fall within one of the existing Elements.

This Report is the culmination of over three years of effort by 16 individuals, who held over 100 meetings and contributed countless hours of volunteer effort on behalf of Concord residents. The Committee was assisted in its efforts by professional staff and consultants, for which it is most grateful. Following is a summary of our findings. Copies of the full report are available at the Concord Free Public Library, the Department of Planning and Land Management, and at the Town Clerk's Office. The report is also temporarily available at the following Web Site: [www.concordvision.org](http://www.concordvision.org), and will ultimately be available at the Town's Web Site: [www.concordnet.org](http://www.concordnet.org).

### **SCOPE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE LONG RANGE PLAN (CLRP)**

The CLRP does not provide a detailed list of suggested "hard choices" in the following pages. Because many resources are limited (such as money and land), a decision as to how to use a given resource may involve conflicting interests and needs. An example of this would be both Affordable Housing and Open Space advocates interested in a single lot of land. These are value judgments that can change over time, and the CLRP Committee does not feel that it is appropriate for a small group of people to make these decisions based on today's values. We have spent considerable time during the past three years wrestling with many of these inherent conflicts ourselves. However, much information is available on the details involved in making these choices, and decisions do not have to be made in a vacuum. In particular, the CLRP suggests the following as just a few of the reports recently completed by various town committees and task forces:

- Open Space and Recreation Plan, June 2004
- Report of the Facilities Planning Committee, June 2003
- Historic Resources Masterplan, 2001 Update
- Planned Production Plan, October 2004
- Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan, February 2003

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Although providing high quality and reliable utility services is critical to the general health, safety and livability of a community, we have for the most part limited our discussion of the Enterprise Funds (electric, water and sewer) to Chapter 9--Facilities and Services Element (Electric, Water, Sewer), since these operations are supported by user fees rather than taxpayer funds.

The goal of the CLRP is to provide boards, committees and citizens with a discussion of the issues involved in furthering the Town's goals, and to provide policies and suggest zoning bylaws that are consistent with the goals and values of the Town. The Committee gathered these issues from comments made at public meetings, from meetings we held with many of the town and school committee and board members, from town and school staff, from representatives of both the business community and interested civic groups, and from the general public. These suggestions are incorporated in over 300 Action Items that were suggested by the Committee's Element teams. In some cases, the Committee has suggested an Action Item that merely suggests continuing a policy that we already are following well. An example would be to "maintain the Town's excellent bond rating" or "maintain the historic and visual characteristics of Concord's roads." We suggest these because although they are done well today, we believe that in the next 15 or 20 years, many key employees and volunteers will have changed, and it is important to identify significant aspects of the Town that we think should be retained and maintained.

It should be noted that we have not included Education as a separate Element, since it was not included in our Committee Charge from the Selectmen. Education is an extremely important topic, however, comprising two-thirds of our taxes, affecting thousands of students and hundreds of employees, and reflecting an important aspect of the character of Concord. We have, however, discussed Education in Chapter 9—Facilities and Services, Chapter 11—Fiscal Resources, and Chapter 12—Governance. A more thorough explanation for the rationale of this decision is included in Chapter 9. One of the recommendations that we have made is that a comprehensive Education Long Range Plan be undertaken in the near future (see Chapter 9, Action Item FS-2.1.5).

Finally, the implementation of the many suggested Action Items should be discussed. It is not the intention of the CLRP to change the way that the Town makes decisions. The Action Items are suggestions that should be considered by the various boards and committees listed in the extensive Implementation Plan located in Chapter 13. The boards and committees will still bring Warrant Articles to Town Meeting for decisions by the town's citizens. The goal of the CLRP is simply to present issues and suggest policies that the Committee feels will lead to the best interests of the Town in the long term. We hope that the CLRP will serve as a guide and tool for boards,

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committees and citizens to make the best-informed, difficult decisions after weighing a comprehensive list of goals and challenges.

### **CONCORD TODAY**

Concord is a community that prides itself on its rich history and cultural heritage. With only 38% of its land area developed, it has many large areas of open space, a wealth of pleasant vistas, miles of scenic roads, and three flowing rivers within its borders. Through the stewardship and generosity of many of its residents and landowners over the years, 35% of Concord's land area is protected open space. Approximately 27% of its land area remains undeveloped and unprotected. Some of these larger parcels are significant in maintaining the contiguous scenic vistas and wildlife corridors that give Concord its special character.

As the price of developable land rises, the pressures for landowners to sell their land for development will also rise. The Town must be prepared to guide some land into preservation, some into diverse housing stock, and some into various municipal purposes. The future character of Concord depends on sound planning, careful regulation, private philanthropy, judicious use of land acquisition, skillful negotiation, a cooperative spirit, and working with market forces.

With about 1,350 acres of land being actively farmed<sup>9</sup>, agriculture remains an integral part of the community's economy and continues to remind us of Concord's rural past. Unfortunately, the Town has been losing valuable farmland to development at the rate of an average of 36 acres per year for the past 20 years. Although about half of Concord's remaining agricultural land is protected, there remains approximately 662 acres that are currently unprotected.

Concord's three Village Center areas (Concord Center, Depot/Thoreau Street, West Concord Village) have unique characteristics and charm, and offer a diversity of goods and services to residents and visitors alike. The visual attractiveness and uniqueness of its shops are two of the many reasons people shop in Concord. Although some buildings important to the town's history are protected by the town's local Historic Districts Bylaw, many other significant buildings and streetscapes are not protected.

Concord has seen a significant increase in "through traffic" as the communities to the west and northwest are built out. Although Route 2 handles much of the East-West traffic, most North-South traffic goes through Concord Center. Public transportation is largely limited to train service between Boston/Cambridge and Fitchburg. Parking availability for commuting and shopping is reaching its limit.

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<sup>9</sup> In addition to these 1,350 acres, the National Park Service leases approximately 77 acres of its land in Concord to local farmers, and approximately 80 acres of state-owned land at the prison are being actively farmed, for total of 1,507 acres.

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Investments have been made in town-wide facilities to maintain and upgrade its buildings and infrastructure. Innovative new uses have been found for facilities that have been considered surplus. Unfortunately, many aging school buildings built in the 1950s and 1960s are having to be replaced simultaneously, which is putting a financial burden on the Town and property taxes at a time when funding from state and outside sources is diminishing. Concord's financial health is still excellent, however, and the Town retains its Aaa bond rating.

With escalating land values and housing costs, and many modest homes being torn down and replaced with much larger, more expensive homes, maintaining a diverse population continues to be a challenge.

### **CONCORD IN THE YEAR 2020**

Our **Vision of Concord in 2020** is that it will be a vibrant community that values its natural beauty, history, and small-town character. The attractive Village Centers will be thriving, our historic sites will remain in context, and our agricultural heritage will be protected and supported. Our key natural resources will be preserved.

Concord will provide a range of housing options, including affordable housing, cluster developments, condominiums, rental units, mixed-use housing in the Village Centers, single-family housing, and housing for residents over age 55. It will allow for a diversity of families to live and thrive.

By 2020, Concord's population will grow by approximately 15%, to about 17,900 persons.<sup>10</sup> Much of this growth will be as a result of the state's Chapter 40B requirement that towns achieve a 10% affordable housing goal. Concord will have nearly fulfilled this requirement by 2020, using the opportunity to build modestly-sized housing suitable for singles, first-time home buyers, families with modest or low incomes, and older residents without children. Land available for conventional development will have been used, so by 2020 most of Concord's residential growth potential will have been reached. Conventional homes that are built will be large and very expensive.

Concord's economic sector will be flourishing. Retail, hospitality, and service entities will meet the needs of both residents and visitors. Concord will provide a positive experience for its visitors.

Regional solutions to through-traffic will help to minimize circulation issues. Safety improvements on Route 2 will have been completed, and local roads will be valued for their scenic qualities and appropriate flow of traffic. Sidewalks and bicycle paths will provide additional alternatives to the automobile. Parking will be adequate to meet the needs of all users.

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<sup>10</sup> Not including prison population.

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Town services to residents will be appropriate at all levels. Both Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional High School will provide excellent educational opportunities.

A wide-range of residents will continue to actively participate in town governance, and resources will be used effectively. Fiscal resources will continue to be well-managed, and there will be reduced reliance on the property tax to fund the Town's operations and capital improvements.

The Town's broadly-accepted long-range planning process will provide Concordians with the tools and resources they need to continue to guide their own future.

### **THE THEMES**

The Committee has identified three "overarching" themes of the CLRP, which we have called "Major Themes." These themes are further described in Chapter 1, with references made to key Action Items presented in detail in Chapters 2 through 12.

#### **Theme 1. Protect Concord's Assets and Character**

##### ***Preserve Open Space and Natural Resources***

Adopt Zoning Bylaw changes to formally delineate significant unprotected parcels. Other bylaw changes are suggested to encourage clustering development in order to preserve as much open space as possible. Suggestions are made to encourage growth in already--developed areas, while creating corresponding restrictions on undeveloped areas.

##### ***Preserve Agricultural Land and Business***

Create an Agricultural Zoning or Overlay District. Cluster zoning is recommended at the edges of agricultural land, including density incentives, in order to maintain most of a parcel's agricultural viability and open space/natural resource value, if the land were to be developed.

##### ***Preserve the Character of the Three Village Center Areas***

Create Village Overlay Districts and require design reviews with the goal of preserving the overall character of each Village. Encourage mixed-use projects (house and business) that provide modestly priced housing and minimize traffic and parking problems.

##### ***Preserve and Protect Cultural, Historic and Archaeological Resources***

Urge boards and committees to use the Historic Resources Masterplan as a resource prior to making decisions about historic structures and scenic areas. Protect additional historic and cultural resources through regulatory mechanisms such as local and national historic districts, the demolition delay bylaw listing, and National Register status. Update

archaeological maps and use them to educate relevant town boards and committees. Increase public outreach, awareness, visibility and access to information about Concord's historic and cultural resources.

### ***Pro-Actively Plan For the Potential Development of Significant Parcels***

Identify parcels that have significant development potential and pro-actively plan uses and designs that suit the town's needs. Work closely with developers to achieve these goals. Work with the State whenever the sale of significant parcels is anticipated, to allow the Town sufficient time to purchase the land or guide its development.

## **Theme 2: Enhance the Quality of Life**

### ***Housing***

Encourage the creation of modest housing, including both rental and ownership units, to counter balance the current trend towards very large homes ("mansionization"). The Town is committed to achieving 10% affordable housing as a goal. Affordable and modest market-rate units should be provided. Ways to achieve this include the encouragement of cluster-zoned projects; by offering incentives for the development of more accessory apartments; and by guiding the development of Chapter 40B projects that suit the needs of the Town. Use zoning mechanisms to preserve established neighborhood character.

### ***Preserve and Enhance the Character of Our Roads***

The minimalist practices for maintaining the character of Concord's roads are innovative in Massachusetts and should be commended. In order to ensure that these practices continue in the future, we recommend that they be more formally established as policies.

### ***Parking and Circulation***

Encourage arrangements for shared parking where the same space is used by different organizations at different times of the day/week. Be flexible with establishing parking requirements to suit local situations in the Village Centers areas. Work with larger employers to develop a parking plan for employees. Investigate greater use of parking meters to encourage turnover. Consider meters in private parking lots. Facilitate remote parking for local business employees. Investigate the feasibility of a parking garage in the Milldam area. Work with regional groups to coordinate traffic flow.

### ***Playgrounds and Recreational Facilities***

Encourage and facilitate the construction of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. Continue to identify additional locations for the placement of playing fields, and make plans for their construction.

### ***Town Services and Schools***

Continue Concord's commitment to maintain the high standard and full-service quality of services and educational excellence.

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## Theme 3. Balance the Town's Needs with Its Ability to Pay

### ***Improve Fiscal Predictability***

Voters have been hit with several years of Proposition 2½ Overrides, in addition to several large capital projects. Taxes have increased at a rate that many residents have found unreasonable, causing many residents on limited incomes to feel significant financial pressure in order to remain in Concord. The challenge is to keep tax increases as low as possible, while meeting town needs and fulfilling citizen expectations for facilities and services. The following efforts should be made to maintain ***stable and predictable operating budgets and tax levels***.

- ***Capital Planning***

Building on the Town Manager's Five-Year "Capital Improvement Program," which deals with routine capital projects that are included in the Town's annual budget, the Committee recommends that a 20-year planning document be prepared for larger capital projects that require borrowing and a debt-exclusion vote from the electorate. We recommend that the 2003 Facilities Plan Committee's recommendation of a "Five-Year Level Plan" for large facility improvement projects be adopted as a general guideline.

- ***Maintenance of Capital Assets***

Use a replacement reserve fund to fund maintenance of town and school buildings, based on a constant fraction of replacement cost.<sup>11</sup> Establish a policy that maintenance funds may only be used for that purpose, to assure that appropriations are spent for their intended purpose.

- ***School Budgets***

Consider alternative approaches to developing the School Department's operating budgets during the period of school rebuilding in order to keep operating costs at a predictable minimum, without sharp unexpected increases. An example of an alternative approach is a Level Resources budget.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly important during periods when taxpayers are shouldering high construction bond costs for school buildings.

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<sup>11</sup> Special legislation would be required to achieve this recommendation. Fund would be used only for maintenance.

<sup>12</sup> "Level Resources" is defined as the cost (\$s) per student for each of the school categories—kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school levels. For this definition, the cost per student does not include capital, depreciation or major maintenance (as described in FR-3.1.1 in Chapter 11) costs for the buildings. "Level Resources" costs do include administrative, teaching, supplies, routine building and grounds maintenance, special education, and any other mandated costs.



### **THE ELEMENTS**

The Comprehensive Long Range Plan has been divided into eleven distinct “Elements.” A detailed Inventory, Analysis, Challenges, Opportunities, Goals, Objectives and Action Items for each Element is presented in Chapters 2 through 12. We have identified and recommended a total of 39 Goals, 114 Objectives and 352 Action Items for the community to consider, study and implement in the coming years. Following is a brief Overview of each of the Elements.

#### ***Land Use***

Concord is faced with extraordinarily high land costs due to a diminished supply and competing interests for developable land. The challenge in the coming years will be to maintain and enhance existing land use patterns, with special emphasis on Village Centers and their unique characters, and the protection of open space and agricultural land, natural features, and historic properties. Among the initiatives suggested are clustering new development to minimize sprawl, and the creation of Agricultural Zoning and Village Overlay Districts.

#### ***Housing***

It is important for the Town to provide a diversity of housing styles, to meet the needs of households of different backgrounds, composition, ages and economic levels. As a town that has grown and developed over 375 years, it contains a blend of larger traditional and historic homes, as well as modest subdivisions and homes. As land becomes scarcer and more expensive, new homes are becoming larger and many households are priced out of the market, which in turn affects the social diversity of the community. We are recommending a number of zoning changes that will encourage diversity of housing, while at the same time retaining Concord’s character.

#### ***Economic Development***

Concord’s business community is an essential component of the fabric that makes up the town. It is important that we provide a favorable environment that supports a diverse local business community; welcomes visitors and customers; and facilitates the continuation of vibrant commercial areas that are visually attractive, economically viable, and user-friendly. Farming is an important component of this community, and serves as a means of preserving open space and farming vistas. Our farms provide fresh locally produced food, generate revenue, provide jobs, and create recreational and educational opportunities. Among other initiatives, we are proposing the creation of an Economic Development Committee to work with local businesses to enhance our village centers and manage growth, and a number of zoning changes to promote farmland preservation.

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### ***Cultural and Historic Resources***

Concord is blessed with a rich inventory of cultural and historic resources that must be preserved, protected, and maintained for future generations to enjoy, appreciate, and continue to assume a responsibility of stewardship. These resources include historic, architectural and archaeological sites, cultural resources, scenic vistas and roadways, village centers, and farmlands. We are urging all regulatory boards and committees to utilize the Historic Resources Masterplan as a resource when making decisions about historic properties or sites. We are also recommending increasing the level of protection for archaeological sites by updating maps, thus heightening the awareness of Town boards and staff as to the location and importance of these sites.

### ***Natural Resources***

Concord is situated in a unique natural environment surrounded by rivers, streams, ponds, wetlands, rare and endangered species, wildlife corridors, and open space and agricultural parcels. Initiatives should be taken to preserve, protect and maintain these natural resources, and educate the public about its collective responsibility in long-term stewardship.

### ***Open Space***

The opportunity to preserve land comes only once, and the timing of these opportunities is often inconvenient. During the next ten years, owners will feel increased pressure for the disposition of most of the significant large parcels of unprotected open land in Concord, either to development for other uses, or protection of their open status. We are recommending steps to protect lands contiguous to large open space parcels, and smaller "green pockets" in Village Centers and the more densely developed neighborhoods.

### ***Recreation***

Concord has a vast array of recreation opportunities available to residents of all ages. Although some investments have been made in recent years for facility renovation and maintenance, the pace for new or expanded facilities has not kept up with demand. This is particularly true of the town's playing fields, many of which are in poor or fair condition, and are overutilized. Potential sites for new facilities should be explored, including cooperative efforts with the Town of Carlisle; public and private schools; municipal land; and federal or state properties.

### ***Facilities and Services***

With a few exceptions, Concord has invested wisely in its infrastructure over the years. Value has been placed on making facility investments that will serve the community well in the long-term, and has been creative in the reuse of facilities as needs and services change. The two exceptions have been construction of new playing fields, which has not been adequate, and school facilities, which have suffered from de-

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ferred maintenance to the point that many of the facilities now need replacement. Concord's long history of being a self-reliant, full-service community has served the test of time, and the high standards of quality and performance should continue to meet the expectations and needs of the community in the years to come. Among the initiatives we are suggesting is the appointment of a Facilities Planning Committee, and the development of a Town Facilities Maintenance Plan.

### ***Transportation and Circulation***

Finding long-term solutions to Concord's traffic and parking issues will require innovative and creative thinking and commitment by public officials and private individuals working together, both locally and regionally. The issues of parking in the commercial areas and increased traffic volume need to be addressed proactively by community officials, and in a manner which preserves the town's scenic and rural roads, and accommodates pedestrian and bicycle circulation throughout the community.

### ***Fiscal Resources***

While its fiscal situation is better than many communities across the Commonwealth, nonetheless, Concord faces the challenge of maintaining a predictable spending rate within the limits of regional and state trends beyond Concord's control. Tax increases should be kept as low as possible while meeting town needs; in particular, sharp increases should be avoided within a few years.

### ***Governance***

Concord is highly respected in Massachusetts for its well-established and workable form of government, and an organization that is professionally staffed and well managed. The town is fortunate to have many capable and willing volunteers serving on a large number of boards and committees. With the 50-year anniversary of the acceptance of the Town's Charter coming up in 2005, the time is right for some study and reflection on citizen involvement and participation in government, and whether staffing levels are appropriate and adequate to meet current community needs and citizen expectations.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Chapter 13 lists the Goals, Objectives, and 349 Action Items recommended in each of the Element Sections. A "Lead Department or Group" has been identified to assume responsibility for implementing each of the Objectives and Action Items, along with a timetable for completion. We have also identified which Action Items would require Town Meeting approval.

Although many of the recommendations can be implemented without much difficulty, many will require further study, review, and technical information to develop further. We strongly recommend that an Implementation Facilitation Committee be appointed by the Selectmen to provide technical assis-

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tance and coordination for moving the Action Items through the various Town boards and committees; to monitor progress on implementation, identifying obstacles or conflicts as they arise; to maintain and update the implementation timetables; and to serve as advocates for the Long Range Plan.

Sprinkled among all of the Elements is the recommendation that a number of new committees or task forces be appointed. Although some are short-term groups designed to assist with a specific task or to help meet an objective, others would be ongoing to address a more systemic need that has been identified. We recognize that additional committees require organizational and staff support, and as such can be viewed as a burden. We have not made these recommendations lightly, and address these concerns and our rationale further in Chapter 13. Perhaps some current committees can be disbanded or folded into existing committees to make room for these new groups.